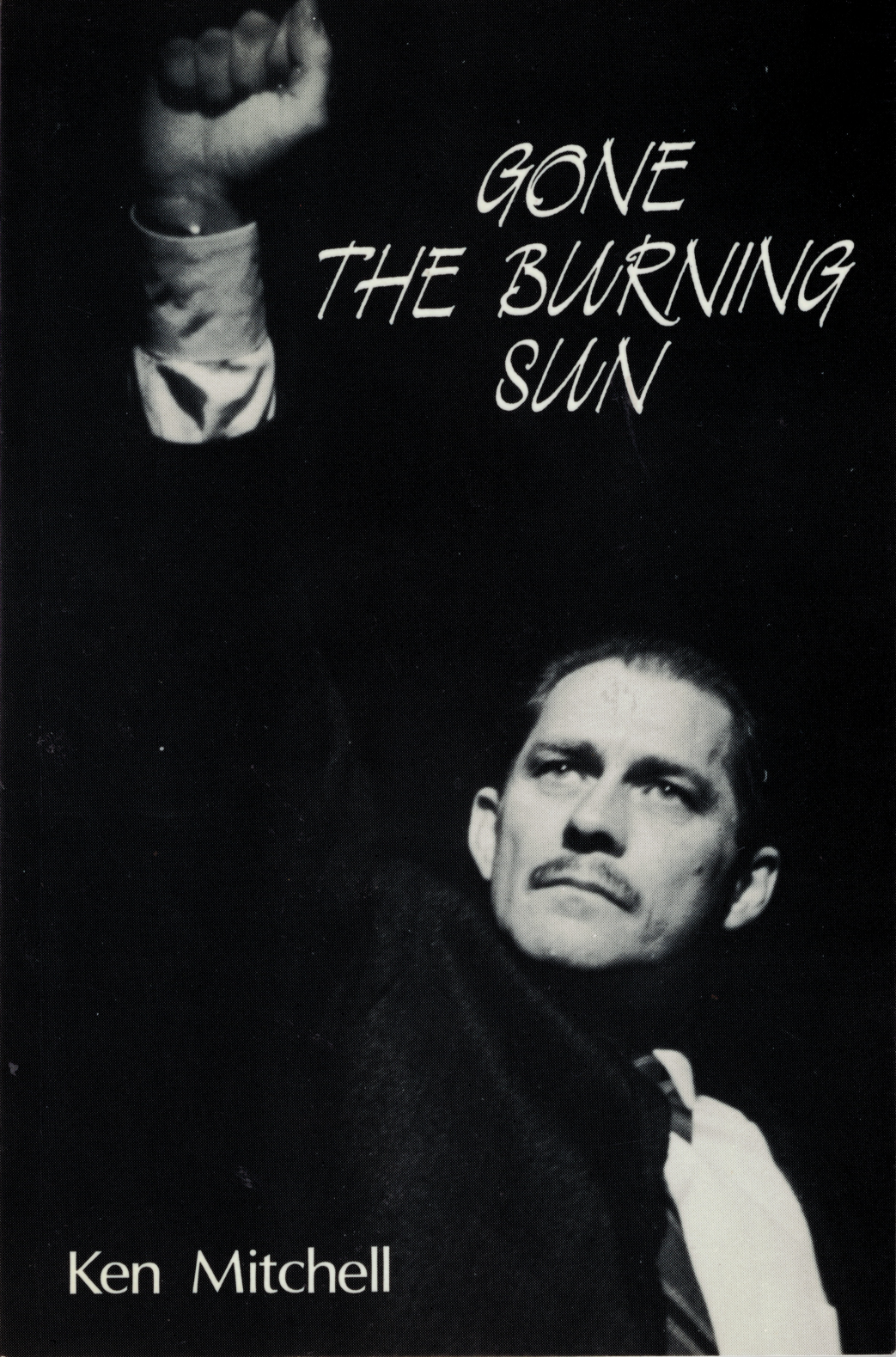

GONE
THE BURNING
SUN
Ken Mitchell

Gone The Burning Sun

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Ken Mitchell

Playwrights Canada
Toronto

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Front cover photo: David Fox in the Guelph Spring Festival/Magnus Theatre production of Gone The Burning Sun.

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Gone The Burning Sun was first performed at the Guelph Spring Festival in May 1984, in a co-production with Magnus Theatre of Thunder Bay. The play then moved to Magnus Theatre for a further run. In both productions the cast was as follows:

DR. NORMAN BETHUNE *David Fox*

Directed by Brian Richmond

Set and costumes designed by John Dinning

Lighting designed by Peter Smith

Music composed by David Liang

Music performed by Pan Hui-zhu

* *The author acknowledges the generous financial support of the Canada Council and the University of Regina during the writing of the play.*

Author's Notes:

I was keen to dramatize the story of Norman Bethune ever since I first read *The Scalpel and the Sword* in the early '60s. For many years I collected an information file on the man -- one of the great heroes of our time. When Rod Langley's play, a CBC film and then another Chinese film were produced on the subject in the '70s, I lost heart. To me they were disappointing, but I felt another version would seem derivative.

Then, while working in Scotland in 1980, I discovered an amazing coincidence: Bethune and I were blood relations. At the very least, we had common ancestors, the legendary Beaton clan that had settled on the Sacred Isle of Iona in the Hebrides during the Middle Ages. My rekindled interest was enflamed the following year when I went to China on a teaching assignment. People on the streets there noticed -- or claimed to notice -- a remarkable physical resemblance. Over and over I was asked if I was a relative of Bethune -- a kind of saint in Chinese political mythology. In remote areas peasants thought I *was* Bethune, somehow come back to life.

It certainly stirred the imagination. I knew that I had before me the subject of a one-man drama, something for which I had been searching for some time. It all seemed very obvious there in Nanking, living in the midst of epic history and culture. I wrote the first draft of the play during a three-week train journey across China.

A personal tragedy intervened, but I finished the play in 1983. I had decided that a full production should have Chinese music to give it depth and resonance. This was given by the composer David Liang, a long-time collaborator. David shares my enthusiasm for "Transpacific Art" -- a synthesis of Western and Eastern modes -- in this case a drama

which we hoped would be accessible to both North American and Chinese audiences.

The idea was tested at two workshops in Canada: the Montreal Playwrights Workshop (directed by Brian Richmond) and the Saskatchewan Playwrights' Centre (directed by Robert Armstrong). I next took the play on an unsponsored tour of China during the summer of 1983. This provided a uniquely Oriental "workshop" in which I explored Chinese comprehension and appreciation of the play by performing it in universities and language institutes fron Jinan to Chengdu.

I can't claim that it won rave reviews, but it certainly stirred a reaction, and a satisfying degree of the criticism I was asking for -- though that criticism came mostly from political or historical perspectives. The audiences were clearly fascinated by an account of their hero which varied considerably from the official biography. In one town, I was up past midnight discussing with students the importance of "humanizing" heroes. In another, I was escorted to the train station and sent away, obviously suspected of being in the employ of the CIA.

So the final changes were made, and David Liang's music was introduced -- the perfect counterpoint to the text. It is written for a Chinese instrument called the *pipa,* a lute-like instrument of great delicacy and beauty. Within the score, he incorporated not only the two songs we wrote for the show, but the international folk songs in the text: the Scottish lyric "The Four Marys," the marching song of the Thaelmans Battalion in the Spanish Civil War and the unofficial song of the Red Army, "Mei yo Chi."

Part of the production design, we agreed, would require the music to be performed on stage by a Chinese woman -- to maintain the kind of taoist duality which had informed the piece from the beginning. Incredibly, we found such a performer in Pan Hui-zhu, whose feminine beauty and musical

articulation offered a potent commentary on David Fox's fiery performance.

Ken Mitchell
February 1985

GONE THE BURNING SUN

Scene One

There is a minimal set: table, chair, perhaps a coat rack with clothing.

Music. Lights come up on NORMAN BETHUNE, *lying on a table, apparently dead. He is coming out of anaesthetic.*

BETHUNE Frances...Frances... *(moves)* Hmm? Where am I? Oh... ward. Right -- operation. Right.

(sits up suddenly, calls)

Frances, where are you?! *(looks around)* Oh, Barney. Am I back? For a minute, I thought I was -- you know -- dead... Did I make it?

(tries painfully to rise from the bed)

By God, I'm alive. Barney, I'm alive! I marched past the big knife! That means you'll do it, too. And we're going to walk out of this mausoleum together! Here, give me a hand -- to that chair. Yes -- now!

Oh!

BARNWELL *helps him cross to the chair. He sits, and slowly begins to dress.*

Whew. Back from the dead. Strange -- that anaesthetic. Dreams. I was in a very strange place -- heaven, I suppose. Buncha people standing around gawking at me. Very odd, Barney -- here's the thing -- they were all -- Chinese! *(laughs)* Do you think God's angels might be oriental? No. Frances was there too...

(looks around)

Come on, I have to get out of this abattoir before the rot sets in again! I can't believe it, Barney -- I'm actually alive! Radical pneumothorax -- and I live to tell the tale! So much for Doctor Warren's "rest cures" and all that mumbo-jumbo! So y'see -- there is hope. For you, too! You are going to make it, old buddy!

Dangerous? Yeah, I suppose it was. They cut away half my rib cage! But what did I have to lose?

No hope. Separated from Frances. Broke as a tramp. A hundred bucks a day just to *stay* in this sanitorium. More like a luxury hotel, for cripe's sake. And bills at home piling up like a January snowbank. All my equipment is in hock. *Impatient?* Christ, if I wasn't so patient, I'd have slashed my throat weeks ago! Know what I told him?

"Doc, you're talking pure bullshit! This elegant Yankee rest home is *not* the way to treat critical T.B. Don't you even read the damn medical literature? Take a bloody chance!"

That's when he hands me that "excessive risk" crapola! I tell ya, Barney, they're gonna force me to take up lung surgery! Not one of these idiots know what's being done in their own field!

"Doc," I says. "This patient needs a new prognosis. If Bethune doesn't get his nicotine and whiskey, he's gonna *die*. I want to walk out of this morgue! I got a marriage to put back together! Listen, if *I'm* willing to take the goddam risk -- why can't you? I spent a year bearing stretchers in the stinking slaughter-grounds of Flanders -- I *earned* the right to take a chance. Sure -- collect all the opinions you want. But I warn you, Doc -- if you don't cut into me and collapse the bad lung -- I swear, I'll do it myself!"

(lights a cigarette, coughs)

Anyway, they operated. And I survived! Barney, for the first time in months, I believe I might make it! Nothing less than a resurrection -- that's what you're seeing!

(sings)

"Farewell ye dungeons dark and strong
Farewell, farewell to thee."
He played his tune as he danced around

Below the gallows tree.

A great day in medical history! April 25, 1927. A T.B. patient prescribes his own surgery and lives to tell the tale!

(approaches the chair)

Get up out of that chair! I'm going to throw a party for my fellow zombies! Right here in our rest cottage! Invite everybody who can still crawl! And the nurses! Hey, about the girl from Texas -- with the green eyes and the uh -- overdeveloped thorax? I thought that'd bring a light to your eye! Well -- it's up to you. Feeling strong enough to sneak into town and hit the bootleggers for a bottle of whiskey? That's my man! To hell with the rules!

No wait! I should send a note to Frances! You can mail it when you get to town! No -- I haven't told her anything about the operation. She ran back to Edinburgh to be with her daddy -- simply couldn't manage life in the slums of Detroit. Well, I can't blame her. Not after I left her to fight off the creditors all by herself.

(sits to write on a sheet of paper)

My Darling Frances. I hasten -- *(crosses out)* -- I am now in a position to clarify -- *(crosses out)* -- I miss you, Frannie.

(addresses her directly, smiles)

"Frightfully." And I frighten you miserably, I know I do. So I can understand why you abandoned me to the fleshpots of a Yankee Sanitorium! Unfortunately, the expense here is exorbitant. If you were able to sell off our furniture, perhaps you could advance me a small portion? A temporary loan. I offer a wistful promise to restore your bank account when I am fully recovered. This may be soon! To the dismay of my doctor. I remain on this side of death's door.

Look. We need to make a new beginning. Back in Canada. Maybe Montreal! Oh, you'd love that! The world will be our oyster again -- if we can only learn to value what we know, and understand what we don't. Like why my Canuck craziness needs your kind of Scottish stability. Or why I can't keep a professional distance from my patients, in the way you want.

I'm just a lumberjack, Frannie. I know I bruise your sensibility. I've never associated with the right sort of women -- and that's why you hypnotized me so completely. Will it help with your folks if you explained that? I doubt it. But we have to keep going -- even through the fights -- which have nothing to do with money, not really -- there's something else -- that lies at the very centre.

(shakes his head, returns to writing)

I think about you now, remembering your

-- glowing eyes, your radiant flesh. It makes me well again. Your "kentspeckle" Canadian -- Beth.

(signs the letter, seals it into an envelope)

There you go Barney. "Sealed With A Kiss." You can nail a first class stamp to that. Oh, don't worry -- I've got plenty to keep me busy. I intend to finish my paintings before I leave this place! You know -- my masterwork -- *(gestures)* -- "The T.B.'s Progress." Oh never mind -- I know your opinion about my murals. Well, hurry back. Maybe I'll paint a different conclusion in the last panel!

BETHUNE *paces around, examining his mural.*

God -- he's right. It does look morbid. Doom-laden and decadent. Not the old Bethune spirit at all. Well, what do you expect from a man on death-row? Little rays of sunshine bursting out of the heavens?

Nine panels. A journey through the valley of death. Five more, and I could do the stations of the cross! An epic drama in one act -- "Bethune Pursued by the Tubercle Bacillus!"

(stops at the first panel, strikes a pose)

First station: "Youth at the Helm."

Straight out of Gravenhurst, our hero surveys the world, opening before him like a flower. Note the glow of confidence on his face! Next: ''The Castle of Heart's Desire,'' haunted by the Seven Sirens. Fame. Success. Wealth. Oh, what seductive songs they sing. But just as he approaches the castle -- the T.B. monster plummets to the attack!

(slashes his paint brush downward)

Bethune falls to the River of Blood. Was the Castle of Heart's Desire a cruel delusion? Oh but -- see here -- another castle -- Trudeau Sanitorium. Will the hero live or die? Is there hope for survival after all? Da-dum-da-daaa!

Well, maybe we'll just have to erase that last gloomy panel. My Angel of Death. *(reads the inscription)*

Sweet Death, thou kindest angel of all,
In thy soft arms at last, O let me fall.
Bright stars are out, long gone the burning sun.
My little act is over, the tiresome play is done.

Norman Bethune. 1890 - 1927.

Cradled in those dark arms--

(starts to erase the portrait vigorously; stops)

No, black bitch -- I won't erase you yet. I'm going to leave you behind -- a joke for my dying friends. *Someone* has escaped your clutches -- right, sweetheart?

(chucks her under the chin, then turns, surprised)

Jeez, back already? That didn't take long! A letter?

(picks up the envelope, opens it)

From her lawyer. *(reacts)* A divorce! *(throws it down)* That blood-sucker! A divorce! How *could* she? Just when I-- *(turns in a fury)* Her family put her up to this! I'll go over there -- plant a case of dynamite -- blow up their "Great King Street" smugness! Stubborn bloody Scots -- bitch! Well, they'll be damned lucky! *(picks the letter up again)* "Seeking fifteen hundred in cash and twenty-five thousand more in monthly instalments"! Ha! You can't squeeze blood from a turnip, boys! *(throws it away)* I'm so deep in debt -- my patients charge *me* interest. Barney, old pal -- it's time for that party! The biggest, raunchiest, drunkenest bacchanal these greenish walls have ever frowned upon. We are going to make death *rumba!*

Scene Two

Lights come up on BETHUNE *sitting on the table. He is swinging his legs, wearing a white hospital coat.*

BETHUNE Good morning, gentlemen! Welcome to the Montreal Royal Victoria Hospital, jewel in the crown of international Medico-Pulmonary surgery. Now -- what does that mean to innocent young interns like yourselves? *(pause)* You're absolutely right, son -- sweet bugger-all! Because in fact it's no better than some waterfront abortion-den when you look at the statistics. Riddled with bureaucracy and rotten with incompetence. So don't look for a medical utopia -- here or anywhere else. The inefficiency will make you sweat. The hypocrisy will make you puke. More patients die in the Royal Vic from the cautious fumbling of old men than they do from T.B. in the slums of Verdun. *(pause)*

Cynical? Not at all. Realistic. To expect better would only create disillusionment. And God knows, there are enough disillusioned doctors already. When *I* was given a second life -- through radical pneumothorax -- I left general practice and became a lung surgeon. One of the best, according to some. Oh, not these old fossils, of course. There are people here who accuse Bethune of *killing* his patients. Well, it's true. I do have a high mortality

record. In fact, I operate on cases they're all terrified to admit into their offices -- the hopeless dying! *(rises angrily)*

So to hell with them! If you want to be lung surgeons, you'll follow *my* technique -- fast diagnosis -- out *there,* in the reeking streets of Montreal -- fast operation, fast treatment! Yes, they die on my operating table. But remember -- Bethune gives them a sporting chance.

(pulls a stethoscope from his pocket)

First demonstration this morning. Identify this object. *(points)* Right! I believe you have a future in medicine, son. Well, take a good look at the "stethoscope." The symbol of life -- right? Wrong! This little device has killed more lung patients than all the cigarettes manufactured by Imperial Tobacco! My advice -- wear it around your neck like a magic amulet. A bit of voodoo never hurt anyone. Remember -- the doctor is the holy priest. But for *results* -- stick to your X-ray machine. Five hundred percent more reliable. And when you're ready to work -- these!

(presents a set of heavy rib shears, gleaming)

Rib shears. My proudest invention. Look dangerous, don't they? Well, they're not made for delicacy. They're made to cut through bone in one stroke -- to collapse the lung -- give it rest. We're dealing with an extreme disease, gentlemen -- and

it demands extreme remedies. Make no mistake. You will get blood on your hands. And other unpleasant organisms. You'll have to overcome some pet aversions, see them for what they are. Maggots, for example. Last month, I introduced forty-six live fly maggots into the chest cavity of a troublesome patient. Couldn't get the septic fluids to drain. Now maggots *love* to eat rotting flesh -- and would you believe it? -- within ten days my little maggots had made him healthy -- by consuming the entire infection. The despised vermin of this world can be valuable, gentlemen, if you allow yourselves to think in extremes.

Well, I don't want to shock you -- but you'll hear lots of shocking things about Norman Bethune. Playboy -- alcoholic -- eccentric. Now -- I'm a red! Ha! But if I'm ever remembered for anything -- it'll be the development of the artificial pneumothorax machine.

(shows a poster or diagram of it)

A pump to collapse the lung. With this machine, I am able to maintain my patients' lives -- as well as my own. Yes? *(chuckles)* No laddie -- medical inventions will not make you rich. Unless you're a psychiatrist. Or a plastic surgeon.

A bell rings. BETHUNE *rushes off.*

Consider these thoughts as you memorize your Latin. Tomorrow's lecture: Bedside Manners and Bigger Fees!

Scene Three

Lights up on BETHUNE *at the table, writing.*

BETHUNE My darling -- Frances.
The winter snows of Montreal have descended. I dream that you are here, your tam glowing bright red up on the Mountain. And -- Edinburgh is a braw wee toon, but very grey in December. Dark. Like our outlaw courtship in George Square. *You* so Scottish, your wee bonny this, your wee thistle that -- your stubbornness. And even then I could out-Scot you a hundredfold, and not just with the malt. Scottish? Beaton -- that was our family name -- till my great-great-grand-daddy fled from the auld sod, and arrived in Montreal a Bethune.

(sings)

Yestre'en the Queen had four Marys,
This nicht she'll hae but three.
There's Mary Seaton and Mary Beaton
And Mary Carmichael and -- me.

The doomed Beatons of Scotland. They first showed up on the Sacred Isle of Iona, off the Ross of Mull. During the Dark Ages -- from Bēthune in Normandy. Monks. Herbalists. Magicians of Christianity that Columba recruited from France. Physicians in God's service for generations. Then the Vikings in a terrible

wave across the Hebrides, slaughtering and looting -- and Columba's flame was snuffed. The Beatons survived, a few of them, as fishermen. Crofters. Except one. Old G.C. Beaton was brought to the court of James the Sixth and made the royal physician -- till he was poisoned by the Scottish lairds. That was the last Beaton doctor, my dear -- until me.

So perhaps that will explain my failures, I mean with you -- and *yes* I can be rehabilitated.

I do enjoy myself here at the Royal Vic. If I thought I could make you happy as well, I'd declare "Come back and marry me again!" If we love each other, and it's obvious we do, why are we separated? Or -- is it the *intensity* of my feeling that causes the problem? Perhaps if I didn't want you *all* the time -- dreaming of caressing your smooth flesh -- stimulating you to erotic acts -- that shock you, I know -- perhaps disgust you -- then I wouldn't desire you at all. Can love be spiritual and physical at the same time? I know I can learn to keep my carnal desires in check -- if only you'll come back. There! I said it. Perhaps, if you did -- we'll meet together as old friends. Live apart. But we could rendezvous on weekends for dinner and conversation, for drives in the country. I miss you, Frannie. I want you here. But I know I mustn't dominate, or try to change you. Just promise me you will consider it. Come and be thyself. The Frannie I knew in

Edinburgh -- self-contained and not distorted. Not an impossible fantasy of my youth. You see? I've matured. Oh, Montreal is a world apart from Detroit.

(looks out a window)

Very gentle, very quiet, very French. *Les allouettes* are fighting in the street for crumbs. And I identify with them. Looking for direction. I *am* planning a Children's Art School with a couple of painter friends. Special project for slum kids. No fees, no cost. We're going to work in my apartment. On Saturdays, I'll take my children to the art galleries, the children we'll never have. I wish you were here. God bless you.

(signs the letter)

Beth.

Scene Four

Lights up on BETHUNE, *jauntily dressed, with a bright scarf. He has a suitcase.*

BETHUNE Barney? You home? Barnwell, you old zombie! Might've known you'd emerge from this elegant woodwork somewhere! No, no special reason. Drove all the way to

Michigan just to bend a friend's ear. Yeah. I depend on you to laugh at my jokes, Barney -- hell, you're the only one who even listens to me. Got any whiskey?

(removes the scarf, takes a glass)

Cheers. Oh -- you heard. Yes, Frannie and I married again. November. Wonderful ceremony. Only two years after the divorce. Romantic, eh? Frances *loved* it -- far more sentimental than I. Hmm? Oh -- no, it's bust again, I'm sad to say. No, the same old story. Can't reconcile our irreconcilable natures. We get along beautifully -- as long as we're not together. Oh, she's taking it all "splendidly." Now she's off to the kirk again -- to marry our best man. Coleman -- an old pal of mine, I think you met in Montreal. I'm sure they'll be very happy. No, no -- we're all great friends.

Barney, don't try to understand me. You never did before -- and you always understood perfectly.

Well -- yes. Fit as a fiddle, I suppose. Thirty miles on skis, every weekend. I know the Laurentians better than my own bronchial tubes. Regular workouts in the gym. I do my own artificial pneumothorax now -- can't trust my homicidal colleagues. I've been fine-tuning the machine. Want to see?

He removes a machine from his suitcase and places it on the table.

He removes his jacket and shirt.

Well -- according to the gout-gang at the Royal Vic, this is dangerous lunacy. Self-treatment. Aaah, I don't fit in there, Barney. I think my career in lung surgery may be coming to an end. You have a clean needle in your case there, Dr. Barnwell? Thanks.

(inserts a large hypodermic needle into a tube)

Novocain? Naah -- don't believe in that stuff.

(plunges the needle into his chest)

There -- between the sixth -- and seventh ribs. Now pump the air -- into the chest -- around the lung.

(coughs painfully, jerks the needle out, grins)

There. Collapsed. "One-lung Bethune" they call me in the *brasseries* of the Old Town.

(puts the machine away, dresses again)

Afraid? Of death? *Me?* Barney, I intend to die of an overdose of sex at the age of ninety. *(laughs, coughs)* Of course, I'm serious! When I joke -- I'm serious! You know that. All right, maybe I'm a bit -- lost. I thought I was onto something when I went to Montreal! Surgery for surgery's

sake. Cut and be damned. But Christ, Barney -- the odds! We need more effective ways of fighting T.B. Now -- the *cause* of disease -- if we could just eliminate that, eh? You know, there are two kinds of T.B. The rich man's T.B. -- and the poor man's. The rich man recovers. The poor man dies. And that's it! We need the Depression before it suddenly becomes obvious. So why are we scrambling for a cure in the medical lab? Now we have social tools -- and we've got to cut out the cause. There *has* to be a way -- right? And I have this sense -- just an intuition -- ever since I left the San -- that Bethune is part of it. Oh, I dunno -- maybe there's some sort of "cosmic adventure" directing my life. Sure it worries me -- and it's really hard on my friends, I know -- Frances, you. Afraid of destroying them in my rush to destroy myself. Oh yes -- that's what people are saying! "Look out for Bethune. A bomb -- looking for a place to explode." No, don't deny it! I know things about myself that people should never know.

(pours another drink, hesitating)

Remember the time I disappeared from the Sanitorium for two days? Frances was back then, after the operation -- I got a letter from her in New York -- she'd met up with some rich playboy -- he was treating her badly. I dunno, looking back -- maybe she made all that up. But I went nuts. I always said I was never jealous, but -- there I was on the train, going after this

chump -- planning how to -- kill him. *(laughs)* Twenty bucks in my pocket. Spitting slugs of fuchsia-coloured snot all over the aisle. Got to town at seven in the morning, up to Harlem, bought a gun. Registered in some hotel. God, I musta looked like a vampire. I rang him up, anyway -- gave him a phoney name, some "long lost friend from Princeton." *Insisted* he come down to the hotel for a drink. Sat down to wait.

(sits, draws an imaginary gun)

"Come in! No. No mistake. I'm Norman Bethune. Beth. Une. Thaaaaat's right -- Frannie's husband. I'm here exterminating pests." *(stands)* "So -- anything to say? *Nothing?* You did screw her, didn't you? Well, don't just stand there, trembling. Defend yourself!" *(advances, hesitates)* "You deserve it? Well, I'll be goddamned -- if -- that isn't -- the mingiest goddamn limp-wristed excuse --"

BETHUNE *suddenly strikes him with the "gun."*

"So, does that stiffen the old backbone? No?"

BETHUNE *hits him several times, going crazy. He stops, coughing violently. He hurls the "gun" away.*

"Aaaa! Get out!"

(calms down)

''Come on -- get up on your feet. And quit that awful *bawling!* I *hate* cry-babies! Here -- sit down. Ah, that's a nasty cut. There's a towel''

(extends his scarf)

''God, what a mess. Well, you can't go down to the lobby looking like this --''

(turns back to BARNWELL, *lights a cigarette)*

Anyway, we drank a bottle of Jack Daniels, got into dirty limericks -- sent him home in a taxi. Came back on the train that night. So -- you see what I mean. Crazy, eh? And I cannot inflict this sort of thing on my friends. My few friends.

Oh, but I thought Montreal was the answer! The gay bachelor's life. Beautiful women -- dozens of them. Plenty of hard work. I paint, I teach -- even started writing poetry! A good life but -- not enough. Still not enough.

I think sometimes I'm really an *artist,* trapped in a doctor's body. There I am standing in front of this canvas of living flesh, scalpel and palette in hand. Now you see why my colleagues think I'm dangerous. I am, too. Oh, you know what I mean. An artist has to *let go* -- abandon himself to action. He comes up into the light like some ''creature of the monstrous deep'' -- all jagged and destructive -- breaking the smooth surface of mediocrity.

And in the banal glare of day, he *enjoys* the purification of violence.

Of course, it's disturbing! The artist's *function* is to disturb! His duty is to rouse the sleeping. To shake the pillars of the world! He must remind humans of their dark ancestry, and still direct them toward a new birth.

I'm no reformer, Barney. I'm a revolutionary! In a world already terrified of change, I preach *revolution!* The principle of life! I am a disturber of the excrement -- an agitator -- impatient -- frightening! I am the creative spirit, liberating the soul of men!

(collapses on the table, drunk)

Where can a guy take a leak, Barney?

(staggers toward the exit)

Scene Five

BETHUNE *enters, straightening his tie. He acknowledges a large audience.*

BETHUNE Ladies and gentlemen, fellow doctors, comrades. I speak to you this evening not as a physician, but as a traveller -- a

curious traveller. Last August, I went to the forbidden land of Russia -- to attend the Physiological Congress, to hear the great Pavlov speak. And I admit I went to Russia to look at the Russians.

What did I do there? Well, I swam in the Neva, wandered through the streets like any tourist, window-shopping. A combination of Walter Winchell, Peeping Tom and an Innocent Abroad. They told me they'd eliminated prostitution in the workers' paradise, but I was able to prove differently. Propaganda is -- after all -- propaganda.

But I saw impossible things. Extraordinary things, and while I did not believe all of them, I came away with one unshakable conviction: Socialized Medicine is the only answer to the greatest disease of all -- the disease that caused this Depression -- the cancer of greed. Greed for wealth. The greed for profit that has entire communities coughing their lungs apart in poisoned air. Monopoly capitalism which forces --

Oh yes! Sneer if you like, pal, but the Soviets have found a cure for that cancer! *Extreme?* You bet it is! So is life. So is the creation of new life. What would a Martian think if he dropped into a hospital, and had to watch a woman in childbirth? He would be appalled at the blood, the agony, the cruelty of the midwife -- the whole revolting process of creation. He'd yell, "Stop! Help! Do something! *Murder!*"

But we'd have to tell him he was seeing magic. That the pain would pass, that the agony and ugliness were only unrecognized joy and beauty.

Well, now Russia is going through such a birth, and the doctors have been so busy keeping the baby alive, they haven't found the time to clean up the mess. And that's the kind of "mess" -- awkward, occasionally stupid --

(responds to a rising crescendo of outrage)

-- mess which offends the nostrils of those timid virgins who cannot see past it, the energy of *new life*. Creation never was a genteel sight. It is crude -- and violent. It is revolutionary! *(shouting)* And to those courageous hearts who believe in the future of man -- who divine the power in their own hands, Russia today is the most exciting nation since the Renaissance! Deny that, and you deny your faith in man!

Scene Six

He tidies up his apartment.

BETHUNE Frances! Oh, I knew you'd come -- if I were patient -- and asked nicely. How's

Coleman? No, I'm sure you make him very happy. Me? Oh, the usual -- a rather interesting affair with the wife of a colleague. She loves to dominate. It's only the danger of it all that keeps the affair going, I'm bound to say. No, beautiful enough, in an aggressive sort of way. None of your charm at all. Wears a leather nightie to bed. *(laughs)*

I asked you to come because -- I wanted to tell you -- I'm leaving. For Spain. Oh. Nothing. A war. Yes, me! I intend -- to fight -- the Fascists -- however I can. I'm sick of the phoney war -- the economic war. In Spain the *real* issues are being fought. There, democracy will live or die.

No -- I resigned from the hospital. Settled my debts, or tried to. The bar bill at the press club was just beyond my means. I had to settle it quickly. And I had to buy one huge god-awful case of medical supplies. Took nearly all I had. You couldn't stake me to a couple hundred bucks, could you? I'm just --

Day after tomorrow, the Empress of Britain. Thanks. No, I assure you it was to say farewell. Look, for you.

(presents a red rose)

I'll just -- set it here. No, I don't suppose we ever can be separated, my sweet. Our lives are chained together -- "for better or for worse." If you could only believe how happy I've been, the last few months, with

you living just a few streets away. You still enchant me. Maybe you feel you're immune to all that -- even though your eyes -- your touch -- *(touches her)* -- your lips --would give you the lie. You've got to put Bethune and the past behind you, before your memory turns it into something romantic, and threatens to seduce you again. You know as well as I do there's something -- self-destructive in me. This fascination with death. And I've learned to tolerate that but -- not your vulnerability. I try to deck you with flowers, and I burden you with my chains! Okay, okay, I know -- enough of this. We must have a *merry* leave-taking, smiling our stiff upper lips, but -- Frances, don't change! Stay yourself!

(near tears)

I'm -- always rambling on -- like this. Morbid. Should be making you smile. I guess -- it's time. You better leave. Please--

He offers the flower, too late. She is gone.

Musician plays and sings: "You Leave, My Love."

You leave, my love,
But I must stay behind alone.

Fragments of our dream
Lie shattered round our restless feet.

Did we ask from heaven more
Than heaven cares to bestow on man?

Now your journey takes us far apart.
Does your troubled heart
Beat for you and me

Or is it beating for a world
I cannot see?

Scene Seven

BETHUNE

Salud, Canada! This is Radio Station EAQ, Voice of Spanish Democracy. Norman Bethune reporting from Madrid. Thanks -- Canadian *cameradas y companeros* -- for the shipment of medicine and bandages. Our medical unit, *Instituto Hispano-Canadiense de Transfusion de Sangre,* has become famous in this bitter war. The first blood transfusion service in military history! A hundred transfusions a day, along a thousand-kilometre front.

The carnage is incredible. In February, the Fascists started bombing Malaga. The entire population forced to flee a hundred miles to Almeria. Hazen and I drove to help them. Thousands and thousands -- so dense the van can't push through. They flash past our windshields like millions of snowflakes in a blizzard. The old ones give up, lie down in the ditch to wait for death. Children younger than ten. Barefoot. Slung on mother's shoulders. Clinging to

her hands. A man staggers along with two children on his back, hidden among the pots and pans. Suddenly the van besieged by a mob of frantic parents. *''Receibeme este!* Take the children to Almeria!'' Holding out their lifeless arms. Eyes swollen from the dust and sun. *''Este esta herido!''* Blood-stained rags around their limbs. Crying from pain and hunger. Planes machine gun the road by day. They tramp all night in a stream of men, goats, children -- crying the names of the lost: ''Gustavo! Gustavo!'' Three days and nights, we ferry the multitude, more precious than our bottles of blood, to Almeria.

But the final barbarism waits. On the evening of February 12th, 1937, forty thousand refugees have reached sanctuary in the little seaport. Huddled in the main square of Almeria. Sirens wail. Mussolini's planes darken the sky. Ten huge bombs drop in the very centre of town. A strategic military target! Bodies and limbs fall through the air like a torrent of bloody rain. Three children dead on the pavement in front of the relief office. Killed waiting for a cup of milk. The street a shambles of dead and dying, lit by the bright orange glare of burning buildings. In the darkness, children's screams. The curses of men rise in a massive cry -- higher and higher. They cry for pity. They cry for revenge. My body heavier than all the dead. Hollow, empty. In my brain, a bright flame of hate.

(sings)

Spanish heavens spread their brilliant starlight
High above our trenches in the plain.
From the distance, morning comes to greet us,
Calling us to battle once again.
Far off is our land
Yet ready we stand.
We're fighting and winning for you--
FREEDOM!

(makes the Republican salute -- a raised clenched fist)

This is Norman Bethune signing off in Madrid.

There is a knock at the door.

Pase adelante! Ah -- Mr. McCullum! *Buenos dias* to the Toronto Party Secretary.

(salutes perfunctorily)

No pasaran! (pause, then sharply) No! I won't go back to Canada! *(voice rising in anger)* I don't give a damn what the Comintern ordered! Bethune *created* this unit -- and he's going to stay until this war is won! How could a Toronto committee understand? *Miracles,* Comrade. We've humanized the face of war! Do you understand, Comrade? Does your dogma-ridden *committee* room? And do I get a say in this "decision"? Our unit was ignored by the "Toronto committee" --

never heard from you until the press took notice. Oh -- *then* funds rolled in! A great success! Well, on this front they respect my skill -- and I'm staying!

Pause. He deflates.

Of course I understand discipline! *(sharply)* I've read Lenin, thanks! And Trotsky as well! Dammit all, if you want discipline, you start at the top! The authority issues a hundred and one contradictory orders -- and takes no action! It's chaos! Everyone trying to seize control of our blood unit -- the anarchists, the unions, the communists! God I'd love to put the commissars against the wall and have the bastards shot! I'd do it myself if I wasn't committed to *saving* lives. I despair of victory in this quicksand of political feuding. You want a new slogan, Secretary? "Power is the opiate of the revolutionary class!" Well, I learned one thing. I'm no general. I'm a guerilla! I belong at the front, among the bullets and blood. The only part of this war that's *real*. Only in the face of death does life have any meaning!

Pause.

Look -- Mr. McCullum, why don't you go and -- tell the committee -- Bethune's just too pig-headed to deal with? He refuses to give up his outfit-- *(pause)* Well, what the hell am I supposed to do back there? *(with great contempt)* Public speaking tour? I know we need funds but there's a Fascist offensive-- A *direct* order! Well then -- I

refuse it. Call it what you want! I will not betray the Spanish people.

(throws his fist up in a salute)

No pasarannn!

Scene Eight

The lights come up on BETHUNE, *preparing to address a huge audience. He wears a red tie. He speaks initially in a hoarse, monotonous voice.*

BETHUNE Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, comrades. I am speaking in Saskatoon tonight on behalf of the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. Our purpose is to raise funds for the international struggle against fascism. We hope you will contribute whatever you can afford. Your money will ease the burden of those who are now sacrificing their lives and their limbs, in the struggle for democracy and freedom. The freedom. Of democracy.

(abandons the text, a bit lost)

I -- I'm not much of a public speaker. My thirty-fourth speech this month. The words are starting to run together. Doesn't make-- Anyway, it's not the money we need, it's to get the truth out -- beyond the press. I know one thing from my travelling across

the continent. We're all being lied to by the politicians and the newspapers. They're blinding people to the real danger -- and all I'm doing is trying to open their eyes.

The papers say Bethune's a communist. Well, who knows? I do believe in the force of history. I try to fight oppression. To see justice served. If that's communism -- this country is full of communists. Millions of them. If it's red to be Christian -- I am proud to be a red. You see, you can't talk about salvation, without talking revolution. The *idea* of salvation is revolutionary. And I preach for social justice because it's the *poor* who need salvation. And I don't mean just the dust-bowl farmers and a generation of young Canadians who have lost hope. I mean, the *world's* poor. The starving billions of Africa and Asia. Why do they starve? Not natural disasters. Not "acts of God"! But the greed of rulers -- the wealthy few who buy off the middle class and screw the poor. Well, that's ending. The old Renaissance ideals are gone -- individualism -- perfection -- the Great Chain of Being. To survive on this crowded planet, people have to learn to act together. Cooperatively. To unite -- and not divide. Right now, we're marching toward another world war. You can see it coming. Inevitable. A death struggle to the finish. Fascism, and the worship of the Individual. Socialism -- and the power of the multitudes. You don't have to be red to understand that, friends. It might help to be a pathologist, though -- because that's all fascism is. A pestilence.

And like the dreaded T.B., its growth will prove fatal to us all. We've seen it invade -- *(points to his chest)* -- the left lung of Europe. Spain. Where Franco and his German pals are on the attack. If we don't halt this demonic plague -- you and I -- the whole free world -- then the lung will collapse.

Now in the right lung, we are seeing the invasion of China by the Japanese bacillus. You didn't know about that? No -- Asia is ignored by our blockheaded politicians and their simpering sycophants of the press. Doesn't exist -- too poor. One week ago, Japanese soldiers blasted the ancient capital of the world's largest nation -- and there wasn't a *peep* out of those freedom-loving, self-appointed saviours of "the free world." Why? Why do they only feel threatened by the Soviet Union? Who is trying to pull the wool over our eyes? Could it be the toadies of the Liberal oligarchy, led by Mackenzie the King? Who's proud to be photographed shaking Adolf's hand?

Well, I'll tell you, friends. Some of you may go to Spain. And the more who go now -- to halt these gangsters -- the fewer will have to go in the years to come. But I -- I am going to China. To the unknown continent, where over half the world lives. There a band of men has organized, and they are going to beat the Emperor Hirohito back into the sea. One day the world will celebrate this struggle. And Bethune is going to be part of it!

Scene Nine

BETHUNE Ever read any Leacock, Jean? Jeannie -- you awake?

(holds up book)

Leacock. He wrote about my part of the world. Mariposa -- Gravenhurst. Good old Canada! Our country's never had a revolution, you know. Not like here. Or France. The States. Even England had Cromwell. And it's so -- amazing! To be crossing through a civilization at its point of ultimate leverage. Even if it's on the slowest damn train since the Newfie Bullet! Yeah -- laughter. That's what we need in times like these. Hang out for a couple of hours in Smith's Hotel in Mariposa.

(chuckles)

Made me think of Parsons. Remember Parsons?

(gestures)

What would he think of Shansi -- with his whiskey shakes -- his terror of lice? A man with a terminal hangover. We could've taken transfusions from his eyeballs! I could've gotten to like the old soak if he hadn't run off with the petty cash after he took one look at Wuhan!

He laughs. Pause.

No, it's not very "amusing," I suppose. Well, if you want amusement, aren't you amused that we've travelled this far -- ten thousand miles -- and I haven't made one pass at you? My pals would be amused, I can tell you! Well, I did consider it briefly. You're a pretty woman -- for a nurse. But -- truth is -- I've never had an affair with a colleague. *(pause)* Colleagues' wives -- that's different. There was a brain surgeon's wife -- a redhead. I have a fatal attraction to you redheads. A different -- scent, you know. Anyway, she arranged a rendezvous on his operating table. Well, a bit *bizarre* I thought -- but safe enough. But he had a special op scheduled for that night. There we were -- full throes of passion -- when all the lights came on! I had one hell of a time keeping that one quiet. A brain surgeon! No. Sex and work should be separate -- like church and state. Render unto Venus that which is venereal...

(looks at his watch)

Five a.m. Or do they have an a.m. in China?

(leans forward eagerly)

What's going to happen when we meet these guys in Yan-an, Jean? I mean, what're they going to say? I'm as nervous as a kid! Talking to the men who made the Long March! And no matter what I say, I'll sound like a political innocent! No idea! How could *we* understand the politics

of a place like this? Or the culture? So unreal. Like the fourth dimension. Yet... I don't know, I seem to remember it from somewhere... The people. Temples. Even the famine and disease. Like at Lin Fen, when the Jap planes bombed our mule train? I helped the carters shift a dead mule out of its harness. And I -- remembered that. Maybe it was some dead animal I'd strained to lift at Bannock Burn six hundred years ago. You didn't know I was a Scot? Oh yes -- the whole black incubus.

But -- ah, China is different, isn't it? Different life. Different universe! We arrive with nothing -- all our supplies locked up in Hong Kong. Parsons buggering off with the remains of our pitiful sum of money. Nothing but our hands and our minds. And the Chinese welcomed us like the Second Coming. Don't give a damn about our politics. It's our *skills* they respect. They seem to -- love us.

(laughs, self-consciously)

And I've rebelled against love all my life! Laughed at it. Cast it off like a bad germ. Now -- to come this far -- and find myself floating in it, like the sea... It's absurd, isn't it, Frances? Hmm? Sorry -- *Jean!* Sorry. Yes -- absurd.

Scene Ten

BETHUNE *lights a candle in the darkness.*

BETHUNE Yes? Who's there? Ah, Tong -- what is it? Chairman Mao wants to see *me?* It's after midnight! No, no -- wait. Just a minute. Can we take Jean along too? It would be a great honour for her -- and she's come so far. *(calls)* Jean! Come on, wake up and grab your boots! We're meeting the great man himself! Tong is here to take us to headquarters. Come on! Forget about a skirt -- those pants look great. This isn't a king you're meeting, it's a guerilla leader. The man who led the Red Army through the Long March -- how far, Tong? Eight thousand miles! Fighting Nationalist soldiers all the way -- through swamps, over mountains, across every river in the country! They lost over a hundred thousand men! And you know how many made it here to Yan-an? Just ten thousand! But oh god, what men! And women! Now, in these hill-caves in the desert, they've built a revolutionary capital. In just two years! A university, hospital, factories. Oh -- he's incredible -- a genius -- a *leader--*

(halts, surprised)

In here? A -- *cave? (pause)* Well of course, it's a cave! Dammit, they all live in caves! The bloody hospital's in caves!

Lighting change. He enters MAO's *presence.*

Ni hao, ni hao. We're very well, thank you.

(turns to TONG)

And please tell Chairman Mao that we -- Comrade Ewen and I -- are very impressed by everything we've seen. We're eager to begin work. I've made a tour of the hospital and I'm afraid I must report that it's badly in need of -- yes of course -- please translate. *(pause)* Spain? Well, I'm afraid there are many problems. Disorganization. Factionalism. The German weapons of the fascists. *(pause)* Who? No, I never met Lorca. They'd killed him before I got there. But I did run into Hemingway in a *taberna* in Barcelona. *(a trifle impatiently)* Mr. Chairman, I was at the front. I am a soldier, my job was to save soldiers' lives. That's why I request that you order your generals to assign me to the battle front. To set up mobile units, as I did in Spain. If you are not mobilizing medicine, you have troops dying without purpose. In Spain, we operated at the front. Seventy-five percent recovery. Seventy-five percent! So if I could just get permission to go to the front--

Pause. He sags with disappointment.

I see. Yes, the base hospital needs attention. But Mr. Chairman, Comrade Ewen can do that as well as I. In fact, if

your medical officers took my advice, they'd blow the place up and start all over! Oh yes -- the caves are a good defence against aerial bombing but -- the dirt! Everywhere. I haven't seen a patient covered with a warm blanket, never mind clean sheets. They sleep on mud *kangs* in their old uniforms! You might as well put bullets through their-- Never mind, don't translate. Tell Chairman Mao that I -- *we* -- will start work in the morning. Of course, we'll need a few basics. First, elementary classes in hygiene for all personnel -- nurses, doctors, even the janitors. Two -- a power generator for the hospital -- for lighting and blood refrigeration. Pardon? Then who *should* I speak to?! No, wait -- just say I've tried to have this done, but the hospital bureaucrats say it must be approved by "higher authority." And I believe we're speaking to the highest authority in the Eighth Route Army. Right? *(smiles)* Good, that's settled. We're making progress, Tong! Third! My nurses will need at least two heavy trucks to carry the blood unit to the front. In Spain, I had-- *What?* No nurses? Or doctors? *(pause)* No trucks!

(explodes with frustration)

NO ROADS? Impossible! I'm not a miracle worker! I refuse to take the assignment! What the hell does this man expect -- *everything? (pause)* He does? *Everything?*

He stares at MAO, *astonished. He sags for a moment, overwhelmed, then blows the candle out.*

Scene Eleven

BETHUNE *writes at a table, wearing glasses.*

BETHUNE Sheng Yin Kou. August eleventh, 1938. Hi there Barney, you old sawbones! Well, you should see me now. Nearly fifty, and a soldier once again. Alive and fighting. In fact, I'm embarrassed by longevity! Is it possible that old age will claim Bethune? And wait till you hear about my creature comforts! A typical village in the Wutai Mountains -- tiny mud houses, three or four to a family compound. Within the compound, a few pigs, children. Dogs. I have a house to myself. One room. A brick oven called a *kang* runs along one side. This is my stove, my bed -- and my table. A paper window admits the evening light.

All right, it's a bit rough. No more than my days in the Ontario bush. Except here we are surrounded by Japanese soldiers. North, east, west and south. At least they occupy the cities and the railway lines. But we inhabit the enclosing countryside -- like sharks in the sea, below their little tin boats.

Today, I've been operating since early morning. Exhausted by happy. Who wouldn't be? Doing what I love most -- cutting and mending. My doctors are anywhere from nineteen to twenty-two. Peasant boys that I've trained. The nurses are all teen-aged girls. But these people are my greatest resource. They study like crazy, work harder than I do. They *listen* when I criticize -- even put up with my stupid temper.

I've persuaded our commander, General Nieh, to let me build a model hospital here. Better training for my makeshift doctors -- close to the fighting. The General is opposed, says a hospital will encourage Japanese attacks. But we are rebuilding an old Buddhist temple in a grove pine and willow trees. Thirty-six beds. When I'm not operating, or teaching, or writing instruction manuals, I help the peasants carry stone and timbers. As for research, I am awaiting publication of my new pamphlet, "Hospital Systems in Guerilla War." Any day now, it'll be out -- printed on the backside of Jap propaganda leaflets! Oh, we learn to use everything! It's like the guerillas' marching song:

(sings)

Mei yo chi, mei yo chuan,
Zi yo na di-ren song xiang-zian.
Mei yo qiang, mei yo pao,
Di-ren gei wo-men zao!

"We have no food, we have no clothes,

But the enemy brings them now.
We have no rifles, we have no guns,
We get them from our foe.''

Oh, I do have my bourgeois perks. A cook, my own house, a fine Japanese horse and saddle -- a gift from General Nieh. Everything is given that I ask for -- except medical supplies.

You must help! Write to the committee in New York. Only twenty-seven pounds of catgut left, eight ounces of carbolic acid. I've got two scalpels, a bone chisel and six artery forceps. Distributed the rest. Ten ampoules of morphine. Two kilos of chloroform. When that's gone we cut without anaesthetics. Conditions are pitiful: food exposed to flies, dirty dressings left unburned. Wounds turn septic in five days. I have bitter arguments with my people -- my usual foul impatience! But in the pursuit of victory, we are unstoppable. That's Mao's legacy. These guerillas know how to unify, how to win people's hearts. The leaders possess no belongings, wear the same cotton tunics as my little Red Devil, Tong. It's not like European fighting at all. The truth is not theoretical, the truth is what *works*. You can't fill a belly or set a broken leg with dogma, Barney. Socialism here is more simple and more complex -- it's a way of life! Unconscious as the movement of lungs, relentless as the beating of hearts.

(sits down to finish writing the letter)

I dream, of course. The opulent cities of America. I dream of coffee. Rare beef. Apple pie and cheddar cheese. Mirages of ordinary food. Books. Are books still written? Poetry still read? Do you people still dance, drink dark red wine, go to the movies? What do you hear from Frances -- anything? I've temporarily -- lost contact. *Hule la chee snach aichk.* Gaelic -- "You see and you don't see." Your old partner. In life and in--

(crosses this word out)

Your old partner -- Beth.

Scene Twelve

Lights come up on BETHUNE *putting on gloves and surgical apron. Sound of battle intensifies through scene.*

BETHUNE All right -- what've we got here? Tong. Take the splints off that leg. Phew! Okay -- gangrene. Get the chloroform ready, Xiao-hua. We'll have to take it off. Tong, you can start washing the leg. Tell the attendants they've got to hold him down. Tight. And bring two buckets full of *kai-shui*.

(lays the instruments out on the table)

Good God! Where has this man been kept? Why do the officers let the wounded lie

around *rotting* for three days? What the hell are we *doing* at the front, if we can't get them in here?

All right -- ready? Hold him down. *(to the patient) Tong-zhi -- ni hao? (laughs)* Good. *Hao, hao.* But -- lost too much blood. Have to fix it, right now. Tell him we're short of anaesthetic. He'll just have to endure it. Good man. *Kuai-kuai -- dong bu dong?* Okay. Give him a slug of *mao-tai.* It's all that'll help now. Hang on. I'll have one, too. Right. *Gambei.*

(drinks, seizes a knife)

Let's go. Streeeetch it -- nice and easy. That's it.

An explosion shakes the table as he cuts.

See the angle? Now remember -- keep these blades sharp. You want to be doctors, you've got to learn the skills of four workers: blacksmith, tailor, carpenter, and butcher. Dammit, hold him down! Give us more chloroform! Now -- cut you bastard -- *cut!*

(hurls the scalpel at the floor)

Knife! Gimme a knife! And it better be sharp, or I'll have your guts for garters, young lady! *(working)* All right. Fine. Forceps. Good. Another needle. Right, that's it. Okay, Xiao-hua, finish up the stitching, will you? I need a smoke.

(pulls a battered cigarette from his pocket, steps outside to light it)

Good morning, General. Morning, evening -- what's the difference? The guns. Destroy all sense of time. Rest? How could I rest when I'm needed every second? No, I *don't* have to sleep! We operated for sixty-eight straight hours last week at the battle of Chi Hui. A hundred-and-fifteen cases. So I don't think I'm ready for bed yet, General. Oh? Why? Any complaints of negligence? Okay, you were right about the hospital. I was wrong -- and it broke my heart to see all our work blown to pieces in ten minutes. But that doesn't mean you're right this time! I do not need to be relieved! My medics are already working twice as hard as I am. What kind of teacher would I be, if I didn't set an example for them? An *order?*

(laughs shortly)

Well, I can't disobey an order, can I, General?

(flops down on the table)

All right, here I am. Lying down. Resting. You don't object if I have a smoke?

He smokes furiously until even he feels ridiculous. He flings the cigarette and leaps to his feet.

Dammit, this is ridiculous! How can a guy sleep with a battle going on a mile away?

General, I came here to serve the people. That's what Chairman Mao wanted. Now, you gonna let me serve the people or not? Never mind "orders"! Exhaustion is a medical question, right? Not a military question. And in the medical command, I issue the orders, not you. So I'm giving an order.

Bethune -- get back to the operating table. Look -- another soldier coming in. See that arm? My men can cut that off. But they can't set it. Do you want that man to carry a rifle again, General? *(pause)* Tong -- where's my knife?

Scene Thirteen

Six months later. BETHUNE *is exhausted, in a trance.*

BETHUNE Kerosene lamp buzzing overhead like a hive of bees. Mud walls. Mud floor. Mud bed. Smell of blood. Chloroform. Cold. North China, three in the morning. Men with wounds. Filthy bandages glued to the skin with blood. Careful. Moisten it first. Then through the muscle. Lift the sleeve. Like a bag. Long stocking. *A Christmas stocking*. Gangrene is a cunning fellow. Give him saline. Intravenous. The cells may remember the warm salty sea. The first flood. The ancestral home. Remember other tides, other oceans. Life born of the sea and the sun. And this one. Will he

run again? Not with one leg. *No, don't pity* -- he made his sacrifice willingly -- for China. The little flame of life sinks lower and lower. Goes out like a flickering candle -- quietly. Silent.

More? Japanese prisoners. Bring them in. No enemies in this community of pain. No strangers among these terrible torn bodies. Lay them down there. Cut that bloodstained uniform away. Stop that hemorrhage. Now -- the piece of bone behind the muscle. Lift it out. Careful. Come round now -- the other side. Oops. Chisel. *(takes a bone chisel)* Now. One sharp break -- here! *Ahhhh! (seizes his left hand, covered with blood, gazing at it in wonder)*

Musician plays and sings: "Beyond the Yellow River."

Red Sun burning in the east
Beyond the Yellow River plain.

People's dreams of everlasting peace
Caress this ancient land like mist,
Softly falling rain.

Does red blood glisten in the sun?
Does peace demand the price
Of so much pain?

Scene Fourteen

BETHUNE *is lying on the table, shivering from the cold. He holds his left arm as though in a sling.*

BETHUNE Frances? Is that you, Frances? Ah, Tong. Did you mail the letters? Where's my bag?

(takes a thermometer, puts it in his mouth)

Never treated it. *Stupid.* After all my shouting at the others. Look at my armpit. Abscess big as an egg. *(reads thermometer)* Forty degrees. Septicaemia. Christ -- that's it. Frances! Is that you? *(looks around)* Who are all these people, Tong? Ask them to go away. Well, don't they know it's rude to stare? A man needs privacy on occasion -- shitting -- dying. Anyway, Frances may come. Okay, okay -- let them stay. Can't make much difference now. Maybe I'll do better with an audience. Need more time to -- mobilize the blood unit -- few more men -- *companeros* -- no, can't go back -- all politics -- ah, there you are, darling, my angel--

(stares in horror, starting backward)

Not you, you black bitch! Get away! Not yet! Go on!

Ah, my cherie, I knew you'd come. What do you think, darling, shall we march to

the altar one more time? Third time lucky, they say. *(chuckles painfully)* Say, you couldn't spot me a few bucks -- just till payday? Oh yes, I'll admit you're a prophet.

"Beth -- you'll never be happy until you die the death of an obscure martyr!" Oh -- you are such an oracle. It was only that *obscure* bit I really objected to. But don't be surprised if old Bethune's ghost comes back to haunt you all. Every revolution needs a dying martyr. And I happen to be available.

But that is my fate, isn't it? I am a Beaton, after all -- full of violence and stubbornness. Intolerant. But with it all, a vision of some truth -- even when it leads, as it did for my ancestors, to an early grave.

I have known it since that spring of our romantic folly in Edinburgh. I travelled out to the Hebrides, to the Ross of Mull -- at Easter, when you were taken away to London by Mama and Papa. I wanted to unlock -- the mystery of my beginnings. Very little there -- a few derelict stone huts, the name Beaton carved above the door. All of them evicted decades before. Except for one deaf old woman -- her children all grown and dispersed to the four corners of the world. The last of the Beatons.

We sat in silence while the clock ticked in her kitchen. Finally she spoke -- in Gaelic

-- asked if I were a doctor. I could -- see my face -- reflected in her eyes. I said I was a -- poet. But her stream of tears made me a liar. She gave me her cross -- begged me to take it. The cross of St. Columba.

(pulls it from his shirt)

My comrades here believe it's a magic amulet -- to keep demons away. And after all those years of -- acquisition, it's the only thing I have. All my paintings. Books. Books. My fine clothes. Naked as Lazarus.

He shivers violently, retches. He lies down, trying to cover himself with his coat.

Tong. *Tong*. Put coal on the fire. Tong -- are you there? Listen. Instructions.

(pulls a piece of ragged paper from his pocket)

We need -- 250 pounds of quinine. 300 of iron compounds. The manual. Printing. Next week. By the typewriter. Mobile units -- operating. Tell them in Canada -- I have been happy. These two years -- the greatest of -- my life. Now -- Chairman Mao -- needs--

Pause.

Frances? Frannie! Ah -- you -- darling. In thy -- soft -- arms at -- last--

BETHUNE *dies, stretched out on the table as he was at the beginning. Lights fade to black.*

The End

Winner of the 1985 Canadian Authors Association Literary Award for Drama

GONE THE BURNING SUN is a fascinating, compelling portrait of Doctor Norman Bethune.

Brilliant, flamboyant and compassionate, Bethune devoted himself to the saving of human life. Armed with scalpel and anaesthetic, he fought for the republicans in the Spanish Civil War, and with the Chinese Resistance during the Japanese invasion of mainland China in the 1930s.

Bethune was befriended by Chairman Mao Zedong and today he is a national hero, revered by millions in China. Until recently, however, he was virtually unknown in his Canadian homeland.

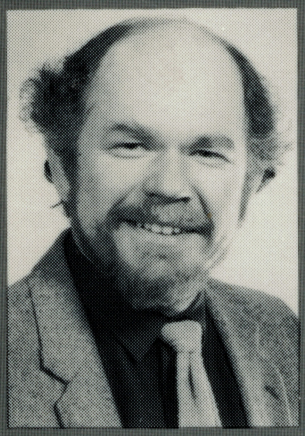
A magnificent, one-man tour de force, *GONE THE BURNING SUN* has been produced at theatres across Canada, in Scandinavia, and a tour of China is planned for 1987.

"Bethune was like a meteor...this dramatization captures his taut, explosive lifestyle..."

—Hamilton Spectator

"...a masterpiece of exposition, character study and insight..."

—Kitchener Waterloo Record



Born in 1940 in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, **Ken Mitchell** is a playwright, novelist, screenwriter and educator. Mr. Mitchell's plays include the country musical *CRUEL TEARS, THE GREAT CULTURAL REVOLUTION, CHAUTAUQUA GIRL, THE SHIPBUILDER, THE PLAINSMAN*, and *TOMMY*. A collection of his work, *Ken Mitchell Country*, was published in 1984. Currently Ken is working in Beijing, China.

Front cover photo: David Fox in the Guelph Spring Festival/Magnus Theatre production of GONE THE BURNING SUN.

Cover photo by John MacDonald
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PLAYWRIGHTS UNION OF CANADA